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Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, June 19, 2008

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TOPIC	PAGE
*Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-13
Juvenile Justice	14-17
Early Childhood Development	18
Domestic Violence	19-24
Elder Abuse	25-26
Health Care	27-28
Legal Aid	29-30
Unemployment	31-33
State Employees	34-38

* Important Story

DETROIT

DPS trustee's kids made wards of court Probe of family to dictate next step

BY PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI • FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER
• JUNE 19, 2008

Detroit Public Schools board member Reverend David Murray's six children were made temporary wards of the court Wednesday pending an evaluation of both the parents and the children.

Wayne County Circuit Judge Mark Slavens set an Aug. 4 date for another hearing at which the Department of Human Services will make a recommendation based on the results of its investigation. His ruling formalized results of an earlier hearing that removed the children from Reverend and Tanisha Murray.

Four of the children are staying with relatives. One is in juvenile custody on an unrelated matter and a sixth is reported missing, Slavens said. The children are ages 2-16.

Slavens said the petition against the Murrays stated the couple had a history with Child Protective Services dating to 1996. One child is the couple's biological child, four are adopted and one is Tanisha Murray's from a previous marriage.

The current complaint documents problems such as broken windows and no electricity in the couple's two west-side homes. Tanisha Murray and the kids were living in a different house from her husband.

She admitted in court that the couple's 2-year-old daughter, who weighs 23 pounds, is underweight because she was unable to feed her enough.

"She also stated she was in fear of Reverend David Murray because of his psychological abuse," Slavens said.

Murray said his attorney advised him to say very little.

"Progress is made, that's all I can tell you," he said. "I'm pleased with the outcome today. I'm pleased that a reunification plan is in place."



Thursday, June 19, 2008

Detroit school board member's four kids made wards of the court

Doug Guthrie / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- The children of a Detroit Public School Board member were made temporary wards of the court by a Wayne County Juvenile Court judge Wednesday, pending continued investigation of claims that he abused and neglected them.

Reverend David Murray, 55, lost custody of four of his children in March after authorities received complaints the children had gone hungry, their home was in "deplorable condition" and police had responded to complaints there about domestic violence.

Murray admitted to Judge Mark Slavens on Wednesday that his home had broken windows, a hole in the living room ceiling and the electricity had been shut off. Murray said the other charges were unfounded.

But, his wife, Tanisha Murray, 35, admitted during the same hearing she suffers from bipolar disorder and fears her husband. She said he has psychologically abused her and failed to provide food for the children. She reported that their 2-year-old daughter was undernourished and weighed 23 pounds when taken by Children's Protective Services workers in March.

Slavens said the admissions were grounds to continue keeping the children out of the Murray home and in the care of relatives.

The girl is the Murrays' biological daughter. A 13-year-old boy is Tanisha Murray's son and two boys, ages 12 and 15, were adopted by the Murrays after receiving foster care from the family. Two more adopted sons, ages 15 and 16, no longer live in the home. One is in a juvenile detention facility and the other's whereabouts are unknown.

Slavens ordered a clinical study of the children and a treatment plan to be prepared for the possible, eventual reunification of the family. Slavens barred The Detroit News from publishing the children's names. The judge set an Aug. 4 hearing to determine what to do next.

Murray, who legally changed his first name to Reverend and is pastor of a small congregation at First Holy Temple Church of God in Christ, was elected to the board of education in 1998. He also is a social worker whose license was suspended in 1990 for disciplinary reasons. The Murrays have an extensive history with Children's Protective Services dating back to 1996. The court substantiated claims of physical neglect in 2006.

The children told authorities they slept on the floors and ate once a day, when there was food to eat. The home was filthy and foul smelling, according to investigators.

Murray denied the other allegations and said the home has been repaired.

"The other stuff was unfounded. There was no issue with the food," he said after the hearing.

The Murrays are allowed to visit their children but Children's Protective Services workers told the judge the older boys have declined to see Reverend David Murray.

You can reach Doug Guthrie at (313) 222-2548 or dguthrie@detnews.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080619/SCHOOLS/806190355>

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

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June 19, 2008

Forensic pathologist: Baby died of blunt force trauma

Midday update

Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Laycee Johnson's mother, April McCoy, 30 of Lansing, testified this morning about the frantic phone call she received from her boyfriend, Vincent Soto, in which he said 12-month-old Laycee had fallen off the couch and was not breathing.

McCoy's testimony came this morning in the case of Soto, 21 of Lansing, who is charged with murder and child abuse in the death of Laycee. The hearing determines if Soto will stand trial on the charges.

McCoy said she was at work when Soto called. "He sounded freaked out, panicked, scared. He said the baby wasn't breathing," McCoy said. She said she told Soto to call 911. She said by the time she hung up and called 911 herself, an operator told her Soto was already on another line.

Laycee was rushed to Sparrow Hospital on May 6 after a man called 911 and claimed she had fallen and was not breathing. She was taken off life support the next day, according to testimony..

About her daughter, McCoy said, "I loved her. She was my life."

A forensic pathologist testified earlier that Laycee died of blunt force trauma and had what appeared to be injuries caused by being struck by a hand.

"The most likely source for the markings would be a hand," said Dr. Joyce DeJong, a forensic pathologist for Sparrow Hospital.

The case is in 54A District Court before Judge Frank DeLuca. The hearing has been adjourned until June 27 when more witnesses will be called..

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

Ready Friday's Lansing State Journal for more on this report.



June 19, 2008

Lansing girl found, uninjured

10-year-old reunites with family; police say no suspect in custody

Ryan Loew

Lansing State Journal

About 20 hours after a 10-year-old Lansing girl was reported missing on the city's north side, police have reunited Diana Rose Windowmaker with her family.

Lansing police spokesman Lt. Noel Garcia said Windowmaker was uninjured but was a "victim of a crime."

He would not provide specifics about the nature of that alleged crime.

Garcia said Wednesday evening that no suspect was in custody and that police were searching for the man they believe abducted Windowmaker, a Lansing man described as black, possibly 5-feet-4-inches tall, weighing about 130 pounds and wearing a black T-shirt, blue jeans and a black do-rag under a black ball cap.

Windowmaker was found around noon Wednesday on the city's north side by a family friend, according to police. She was reported missing Tuesday afternoon in the company of an older man.

Garcia said the friend called police, who then picked her up.

Police issued an Amber Alert Tuesday for Windowmaker, who went missing at about 3:30 p.m. in the 700 block of West Maple Street near Comstock Park, Garcia said.

Police do know the suspect's identity, Garcia said, adding that Windowmaker and the suspect were acquaintances.

Police are not releasing what they believe Windowmaker was doing or where she was for the approximately 20 hours she was missing.

Garcia described Windowmaker's return as "very emotional" for her family.

"They're glad to have her back," he said.

Lansing police Detective Connie Birdsley said Windowmaker appeared to have been cooperating with the man when she was abducted, and the two left the area on foot, she said.

Garcia said a younger brother was the last to see her before she was abducted.

While police don't believe the man took Windowmaker by force, Garcia said, there was still concern for her safety.

"We feel she was in danger, and that's what the urgency was in locating her," he said.

Garcia said Windowmaker was with family members visiting a friend in the area of Comstock Park when she was abducted.

Windowmaker lives with her mother and two younger brothers at an assisted living center in Lansing

not near the Comstock Park area, he said.

The reported abduction left some in that neighborhood startled.

Kathy Rogers, who lives on Pine Street and is the coordinator of the Neighborhood Watch 127 and vice president of the Old Forest Neighborhood Association, said she was concerned about neighborhood safety.

"I've got a granddaughter who is 13, and it really makes you wonder if it's safe," she said.

Her granddaughter does not live in Lansing but visits frequently in the summer.

"It could happen any place," said Crus Torres, a 72-year-old Brook Street resident and grandmother.

"We just gotta do the best we can and keep an eye on everyone."

Contact Ryan Loew at 377-1206 or rloew@lsj.com.



June 19, 2008

Police: Man arrested in connection with Lansing girl's abduction

Midday update

Ryan Loew
Lansing State Journal

Police have arrested a man they say abducted a 10-year-old Lansing girl on Tuesday.

Lansing police spokesman Lt. Noel Garcia said the suspect was arrested at around 7 p.m. Wednesday in Lansing.

According to Garcia, the suspect is a 17-year-old Lansing male. He is expected to be arraigned at 3 p.m. today in 54A District Court. Garcia declined to say what charges investigators are seeking.

Diana Rose Windowmaker was found around noon Wednesday on the city's north side by a family friend, according to police. She was reported missing Tuesday afternoon in the company of an older man.

Garcia said the friend called police, who then picked her up.

Police issued an Amber Alert Tuesday for Windowmaker, who went missing at about 3:30 p.m. in the 700 block of West Maple Street near Comstock Park, Garcia said.

Garcia has said that Windowmaker and the suspect were acquaintances.

Garcia said Windowmaker was uninjured but was a "victim of a crime." He would not provide specifics about the nature of that alleged crime.

Check back with www.lsj.com for updates.



Grand Rapids mother relieved to have son back

Thursday, June 19, 2008

By Theresa D. McClellan

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Leah Huff was waiting in her driveway when the Grand Rapids Police cruiser pulled up with her bright-eyed son in the back seat.

"I said, 'Where you been boy,' and I just hugged him and hugged him and hugged him," his mother said.

She was relieved to have her 11-year-old son, David Darnell Williams, back in her Northeast Side home.

But she was angry that Mikell Huff, the man who disappeared with his stepson Sunday night, had her so worried for three days.

She and her husband, who has helped care for the boy since he was 2, had reconciled after a nine-month separation, she said. Then, Huff disappeared with her son after saying they were going to play video games.

When they didn't return, she feared something happened to them and grew more concerned as the days passed.

"I wasn't afraid that he would do anything to David. He wouldn't let anything happen to David. But he knows what I've been through, and this makes no sense. But God is good and my baby is back," Leah Huff said Wednesday night as she alternated between giving her son chores and holding him close.

Leah Huff lost a son, 24-year-old Dontis Searcy, when he was shot and killed in December 1997 during an argument.

After getting the police and media involved early this week, she received a call around 11 a.m. Wednesday from Mikell Huff saying that he and the child were fine and in Saginaw.

"He told me to tell (the police) it was a mistake, but I told him this was no mistake. He was wrong for taking him that long without calling me, and he was in trouble," she said.

Grand Rapids Police were tracking the location of the phone call and knew Huff has a sister in Saginaw, said Lt. Ralph Mason. They were seeking a kidnapping warrant, then they learned Huff never left town.

Around 6 p.m. Wednesday, David Williams called police to say that he was at a classmate's home on Caledonia Street NE, just a few blocks from home.

"Someone told the child he was a missing person and his face had been all over the media," Mason said.

Police picked up the boy and took the stepfather away in handcuffs.

A man visiting from Muskegon said he arrived to see Huff sitting on his friend's porch.

"Then, one police cruiser pulled up and another with handcuffs, I just said, 'Whoa, I don't know anything,'" said the man, who declined to be identified.

Leah Huff was surprised at where her son was found, and was relieved to hear he was not hurt.

The child said he hung out with his father in hotel rooms and they drove around a lot. He never knew anything was wrong.

Huff may be charged with kidnapping, Mason said, and was lodged in Kent County Jail on a parole violation.

Send e-mail to the author: tmcclellan@grpress.com

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'Predator' shows no remorse during sentencing

Thursday, June 19, 2008

By Barton Deiters
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- In what authorities are calling the worst case of criminal sexual abuse of children in memory at Kent County Circuit Court, a 28-year-old man has been sentenced to 75 to 150 years in prison.

Jamie Andrew VanKlaveren heard himself described in court Wednesday as a monster by a judge, a prosecutor and the mother of one of his eight victims in southern Kent County.

"My son has been transformed from a normal, happy adolescent to an angry young man," one victim's mother told Judge George Buth. "He stole my little boy from me."

The eight victims took the stand during the weeklong trial last month and talked about VanKlaveren giving them alcohol, marijuana and psychotropic medicine before they were sexually assaulted. It took a jury only a few hours to convict VanKlaveren on 16 charges of every degree of criminal sexual conduct.

"He is a predator, a monster. I'm hesitant to even include him in the human race," the mother said. "If I had my way, he would be sentenced to death." VanKlaveren, who lived in Wyoming and other areas in Kent and Allegan counties, spoke Wednesday without remorse, saying he was wrongly convicted. The man -- who when arrested insisted police refer to him as "pastor" -- said he was seeking to befriend the children and serve as a role model.

"I harbor no ill will toward any of my accusers," VanKlaveren said.

He said he is shocked his good intentions and pure motives were twisted into accusations of depraved "pederacy."

"I will not relent or consider giving up until every one of these convictions are overturned," VanKlaveren said.

Assistant Kent County Prosecutor Helen Brinkman said, in two decades of prosecuting child predators, she never encountered as heinous a case as this. She said other victims in Kent and Allegan counties have not come to court and that, in light of the 75- to 150-year sentence, she will recommend Allegan County authorities drop charges to spare victims the trauma of another public trial.

"This is the worst case I've ever seen," said Buth, a Circuit Court judge since 1987.

Buth sentenced VanKlaveren under a state law implemented in 2006 that makes first-degree criminal sexual conduct a minimum 25-year felony and lets the judge impose multiple sentences consecutively.

While the mother of one of the victims would have preferred the death penalty, she was happy with the judge's conclusion.

"It's great," she said. "He deserves it."

Prosecutor to ask state to care for teen in video

Posted by [Kathy Jessup | Gazette](#) June 19, 2008 09:26AM

KALAMAZOO -- Kalamazoo County Prosecutor Jeff Fink said Wednesday that his office is preparing a dependency petition to ask the state to take responsibility for the "care, custody and guidance" of a Kalamazoo teenager seen on a video being shoved into a wall by a Public Safety officer.

Just before the shoving incident, the video also shows the 16-year-old shouting profanities at the officer and struggling with him. Fink called the teenager "a high risk to himself and others."

Before the May 22 incident, the teen had been charged with 20 misdemeanors and felonies for a variety of alleged offenses since 2005, ranging from assault to marijuana possession. However, in each case he was not prosecuted because judges found him mentally incompetent to stand trial, court records show.

"I can't ever remember having a juvenile file with this many petitions," Fink said.

The court records do not detail the exact nature of the teen's disability. But one forensic evaluation concluded his incompetence was "for reasons largely organic and not subject to rehabilitation efforts."

Fink said a third psychological evaluation last week again found the teen incompetent to stand trial. Fink said he won't issue new charges against the youth for allegedly resisting officers and violating Kalamazoo Transportation Center rules on May 22.

Sheran Pearson, founder and president of the group Young Black Males, said the case illustrates a system that has failed a mentally challenged youth.

"Society has failed this child. We all have failed him," Pearson said. "He's a juvenile and who got him some true help? The system will wait for him to become an adult. I've had detectives tell young people, 'When you turn 17, I'm waiting on you.'"

The teen's age and mental competency leave the legal system with few alternatives without the dependency petition, Fink said.

"Right now, because of the psychiatric evaluations, the court can't intervene," he said. "I went out and looked at his file. He's a high risk to himself and others, I believe."

Jeff Fink is the Danger to every one before the court. Knowing he helped falsify Forensic Evaluations I think Fink should disqualify himself permanently, check himself in!



June 19, 2008

Teen sentenced in foster brother's murder

16-year-old gets up to 20 years in prison for Lansing shooting

Gerrick Lewis

Lansing State Journal

Ed Austin broke down in tears Wednesday as he addressed Thomas Mack, the teenager who killed Austin's 14-year-old son, Daniel.

"The murder of my son has devastated my life in so many ways," the father said. The rest of his statement was barely audible through his sobs.

Mack, 16, of Lansing was sentenced to seven and a half to 20 years in prison for the April 2007 shooting of his foster brother.

"This tragedy can't be undone," said Ingham County Circuit Court Judge James Giddings. "This sentencing is a feeble response to a terrible tragedy."

Wearing a green jail jumpsuit, Mack kept his head down during the sentencing Wednesday morning.

"I wish I would have never spent the night at my foster brother's house," Mack said in court. "I would like to apologize for having all this happen. I would like a second chance when I get out of prison or if I do."

The shooting happened in the apartment of Christopher Stragier, who is the son of the boys' foster parents, Steve and Judy Stragier.

Christopher Stragier testified last year that he left Mack, Daniel and another foster brother in his apartment with a shotgun and an assault rifle while he went to work.

No charges have been filed against Christopher Stragier or his parents.

"It was clear that these boys were not to be left unsupervised," said Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunning III. "Whether or not that is sufficient for a criminal charge is unclear."

Daniel Austin's grandmother and other relatives also were present in court.

"I loved him so much. It almost cost me my life. I spend many hours a day at his grave just talking to him," said grandmother Mary Austin, as she read a statement.

Mack's mother, Linda Coleman, buried her face in her left hand during the statements and the sentencing.

At the plea hearing in April, Mack said he stood five feet from Daniel Austin, who was sitting on a love seat, when he pointed a loaded 12-gauge shotgun at Daniel's face and pulled the trigger.

Mack's attorney Keith Watson said Mack has shown remorse for the crime.

"He was a product of dysfunction but he takes responsibility for what he did," Watson said.

Robin Blackman, a relative of Stragier, said she thought justice was served "as best as it could be

under the circumstances."

"I think every person that has come into contact with (Mack) has not done their job," Blackman said.

"He has been a throwaway kid."

Contact Gerrick Lewis at 377-1213 or gdlewis@lsj.com.

Michigan Report

June 18, 2008

PERUCHIETTI, DILLON CHIEF OF STAFF, TO LEAVE

Cindy Peruchietti, who has served as chief of staff for House [Speaker Andy Dillon](#) (D-Redford Twp.) for the last year and a half as part of a 22-year career in the Legislature, is resigning July 3. Ms. Peruchietti will become chief administrative officer for the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, while Peter Cunningham will succeed her as the chief of staff for Mr. Dillon. Her assignment with Mr. Dillon was her second high office with a House speaker, following a stint in 1993-98 as deputy chief of staff for then-Speaker Curtis Hertel. She had also served as chief of staff to Senate Democratic Leader Bob Emerson in 1998-2006.

"Cindy is an invaluable, highly capable member of my team who commanded tremendous respect from the entire Legislature and fought hard every day on behalf of Michigan's families," Mr. Dillon said. Mr. Cunningham has been Mr. Dillon's deputy chief of staff and legislative director, and was previously legislative director for former House Democratic Leader Dianne Byrum.

Family altercation involving machete ends in jail cell for both



Anderson

By Don Reid
The Coldwater Daily Reporter

Wed Jun 18, 2008, 11:37 PM EDT

COLDWATER — A father's attempt to kick his unemployed son out of the house ended in a jail cell for both, as well as six stitches for the son in his leg from a machete wound.

Jeffrey James Anderson, 19, pleaded guilty to an assault on his father.

"I hit him in the chest with a baseball bat," reports indicate he said.

Jeffrey Todd Anderson, 45, is in jail on a \$25,000 bond, as he's been charged with a four-year felony — assault with a deadly weapon.

The son said the argument started when the father asked for his key to the apartment at 75 N. Hanchett St. early Tuesday morning. The son threw the

key.

"I pushed him back and all hell broke loose," he said.

During the altercation the son grabbed a machete, reports indicate.

"I wanted to leave but he got the knife and tried to cut off my toes," the son said. "He got my leg."

The son was treated at the emergency room at Community Health Center of Branch County, and his father refused treatment.

The son told Branch County District Court Judge David Coyle that his father was drinking, but he wasn't. The father's blood alcohol level was .21, according to Coldwater Police Department reports.

Judge Coyle ordered the son be held with no bond, pending sentencing on the one-year misdemeanor. The father will have a preliminary examination June 25. Judge

"This is serious," Judge Coyle told the father during video arraignment.

"Somebody could've been killed."

MORNING SUN

'Mary's law' advances in state Legislature

By LISA SATAYUT
Sun Staff Writer

A law that would track the whereabouts of those charged with domestic violence-related crimes unanimously passed the Senate judiciary sub-committee Tuesday.

The bill, introduced by state Rep. Bill Caul, R-Mt. Pleasant, is now on its way to the Senate floor.

House bill 4453, called "Mary's Law," would grant a court the discretion to require a defendant released on bail to wear a GPS tracking device that would pinpoint the exact location of the defendant.

The victim would be notified if the attacker was anywhere in the area. This would allow them time to get somewhere safe.

If the bill passes the full Senate, it will go back to the House and then to the governor for approval.

Ryan Wenberg, a spokesman for Caul, said the name of the bill was intended to be specific.

"It's specific to the exact case and directly related," he said of Mary Babb.

Babb was shot and killed by her husband Jan. 9, 2007 in the parking lot of her workplace, the Morning Sun. She had a personal protection order against her husband, but the piece of paper could not physically stop him.

Wenberg said Babb might be alive today if this type of law had existed.

"We knew we needed to do something," he said.

"We were thinking about what could have been in place," he said.

A GPS unit would be either attached or carried by the offender. The victim would have a pager on them that would alert them if their offender is near.

"This has been our number one priority," Wenberg said of the bill.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.themorningsun.com/stories/061908/loc_maryslaw.shtml

River House Inc. seeks to replace stolen bicycles

by Dan Sanderson-Crawford County Avalanche Staff Writer

Thursday, June 19, 2008 8:53 AM EDT

Officials at River House Inc. are seeking to have bicycles donated to the facility, for victims of domestic violence, to replace a pair of bikes stolen earlier this month.

Two bikes were stolen from River House Inc. during the evening hours on Wednesday, June 4.

The mountain bike and 10-speed bike were donated to the River House Shelter five years ago, when it moved from its former location on the Mercy Grayling Hospital Campus to its new facilities located off of North Down River Road in Grayling Township.

The bikes were given to the shelter to give women and children staying there another means of transportation to run errands, get to appointments and for recreation.

The bikes were taken from a bike rack at the shelter. Larry Hufnagel, the financial coordinator for River House Inc., said the bikes were not locked to the bike rack due to the security cameras at the facility and the staff time required to lock and unlock the bikes when the clients request to use them.

"We didn't think we needed to lock them up because they weren't any great thing, but I guess we're going to have to change that," said Hufnagel, who maintains the bikes at the shelter.

Hufnagel filed a police report with the Crawford County Sheriff's Office. He also spoke with sheriff office officials and Grayling City Police Chief Karl Schreiner regarding the possibility of having the bikes replaced.

Since Grayling Police and Crawford County Sheriff's Office officials have to go through necessary protocols before disposing of bikes, River House Inc. is seeking help from the community to have the bikes

replaced.

"We don't have the money in our budget to replace them, and we are looking to the community to help us out," Hufnagel said.

Hufnagel said that any bikes that are suitable to ride, or that may require minor maintenance, will fit the needs of the shelter.

"What we're looking to replace them with is anything that is rideable," he said. "We don't want something that we have to put a bunch of money into because we just don't have it."

Crawford County Sheriff Kirk Wakefield said that finding a stolen bike is rare, but encourages anyone who has a bike missing to report it in case it is recovered by sheriff's deputies.

"That's one of the biggest problems we have, because if we find them, we have no idea who they belong to," Wakefield said. "If we find something, then we can match it up to the person it belongs to."

The sheriff's office auctions off the bikes when it has a number of bikes in its storage area, but checks the police reports for stolen property and tries to notify the public of the auction, in an effort to return the bikes to their rightful owners.

The Grayling Police Department has put a similar public notice in the Crawford County Avalanche. Officers attempt to return the bikes to their owners if they can give an accurate description of the bikes they have recovered. Bikes that are not claimed by next month will go to charitable organizations such as the Kenquest House, a home for pregnant teens, Camp AuSable or River House Inc.

"We need to go through that process first, but I have a couple of bikes that would work for them," Schreiner said.

Schreiner said that kids, or people looking for a quick ride around town, steal bikes when warm weather arrives, then abandon them in the weeds or on the side of the road. Other bikes are stripped down and repainted for personal use.

Schreiner encourages everyone to lock their bikes up when they are outside of their homes or traveling around the town.

"It's just an invitation for somebody to steal them if they are not locked up," he said.



Grandparents deserve to be involved in kids' lives

EDITORIAL

The positive role of grandparents in a child's life is indisputable. Youngsters lucky enough to have not only their parents but grandparents still alive definitely have advantages other children are missing.

The love and wisdom of grandparents are unequaled and sorely needed in today's society.

Unfortunately, grandparents today aren't valued as much as they should be.

In fact, sometimes they not only are ignored by their children but actually abused, both physically and emotionally.

That's why Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm has declared this week, June 15-21, as Elder Abuse Awareness Week in Michigan.

An estimated 80,000 Michigan residents age 60 and older are victims of elder abuse. Michigan Department of Human Services officials predict, as the aging population increases, Michigan could report more than 100,000 cases of elder abuse by the year 2010.

Forms of elder abuse include physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse, neglect, abandonment, financial or material exploitation and self-neglect.

State officials urge people to report any suspected abuse of older adults by calling the toll-free, 24-hour Vulnerable Adult HelpLine at (800) 996-6228.

Fortunately, most grandparents don't face severe abuse from their children. Many times, however, they are inadvertently forgotten or taken for granted.

There's an axiom that says "Grandchildren are God's gift for growing old."

And for many families blessed with three living generations - children, parents and grandparents - this saying has real and deep meaning.

However, there are many parents who don't value the potential positive contributions of grandparents in their children's lives. Some consciously strive to keep their children from ever seeing their grandparents.

Often, it's because of a bitter divorce, where the custodial parent is trying to

get even with the estranged spouse.

It's a bitter, mean-spirited attitude that robs a child of invaluable contact with grandparents who can offer them a sense of heritage, a wealth of life experiences, immeasurable support and, most importantly, unconditional love.

Through the years, numerous laws in Michigan and throughout the nation have attempted to secure visitation rights for grandparents who, like children, often are the innocent and helpless bystanders of divorce.

Unfortunately, existing laws often are confusing and are constantly being revised. They need to constantly be reviewed and updated to ensure grandparents' rights, but at least the laws are a start.

So many times in life, a child never gets to really know his or her grandparents. Maybe they've died before the individual was born. Maybe they live too far away to visit often enough to create a bond. Maybe it's the grandparents' choice to remain distant.

But the biggest tragedy is when that special bond between a grandparent and grandchild is denied because of heartless, bitter parents.

This can be avoided so easily if divorced parents would just remember to act in the best interests of their children.

Obviously, if a relationship is going to be detrimental to a child, it shouldn't be allowed. But the bitterness of divorce or the death of one parent shouldn't keep a child from the myriad of blessings a grandparent can offer.

If grandchildren truly are God's gift for growing old, then it's a sin for anyone's personal vendetta to interfere with that relationship.

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http://www.theoaklandpress.com/stories/061908/opi_20080619210.shtml

MORNING SUN

Central Michigan District Health Department plans dental clinic

By LISA SATAYUT
Sun Staff Writer

A new dental clinic that would provide services to Medicaid recipients and the uninsured in Isabella County could be the newest addition to the Central Michigan District Health Department.

The idea was presented to the Isabella County board of commissioners Tuesday and would require the construction of additional space at the Isabella County Public Health Building.

"For the most part, local dentists do not accept Medicaid," CMDHD health officer Mary Kushion said.

In Isabella County there are approximately 5,000 Medicaid recipients who rely on government assistance for health care. But a majority of those recipients are not receiving dental services and are forced to live with decaying teeth and gum diseases.

"There is a need in Isabella County," she said of this type of service.

A large reason why local dentists choose not to participate in the Medicaid program is the amount of time it takes the state to reimburse the dentist offices and the amount they are reimbursed.

"The Medicaid reimbursement is so low most local dentists do not participate," she said.

The amount that the state reimburses to the dentist is not enough to cover the costs of the services.

The health department, which covers six counties, would operate the clinic through a contract with Michigan Community Dental Clinics, a Michigan not for profit organization.

MCDC was created as a response to the statewide issue of dental access to the poor, spokesman Gerald Chase said. Chase is also on the finance and development team for a management and consulting corporation named NorthStar. Northstar is a non-profit that was established to support public health within Michigan.

The dental clinic would operate without any net local support, Chase said. In order for this to happen, the health department would have to raise \$45,000 towards the start-up costs of the clinic. Kushion said the department is looking to raise those funds from non-governmental local sources.

Kushion came to the board asking for their support in the project. The

financing of the clinic including equipment, construction period interest, and bond issuance or loan processing costs is approximately \$800,000.

The board gave their approval saying they "approve the concept" of the dental clinic and hope that their approval will help the CMDHD in raising funds.

After commissioner Roger Trudell was assured that the project would come at no cost to the taxpayers, he approved the concept as well.

"I support this project 100 percent," commissioner Ron Roby said.

If anyone is interested in donating to the dental clinic start-up costs call Kushion at 773-5921 extension 121.

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http://www.themorningsun.com/stories/061908/loc_cmdh.shtml

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Poor deserve better treatment in criminal court

Defense for the indigent is uneven and often inadequate

The Detroit News

The legal defense provided poor people who are accused of crimes is often inadequate, uneven or unfair, according to a new report from a national legal defense organization. The cost of bringing Michigan's expenditure on legal defense up to average spending across the nation would be \$50 million, the report notes.

It will be very difficult to come up with the money to solve all of the problems revealed in the report. But some things can be done immediately both by the Legislature and members of the legal profession that would improve the situation.

The report by the National Legal Aid and Defender Association was produced at the request of the Legislature. The report notes that Michigan leaves the provision of defense attorneys for the poor to the counties, which have varying approaches.

Some have public defender offices, some have judges assign attorneys on a case-by-case basis and some hire attorneys on a contract basis to provide criminal defense work. The report favors state-funded public defender offices as providing the most independent and vigorous representation to poor defendants. Contract defense work is the most problematic, the report contends, because defense attorneys have an incentive to save money by doing as little work as possible on their cases.

The problems are most acute at the district court level in some jurisdictions, the report found, where poor defendants often receive no criminal defense

for the relatively minor offenses handled at that level, often through maneuvering by court officials to have the defendants unwittingly give up their right to an attorney to speed court dockets.

What can be done to remedy the situation? First, the Legislature should adopt state standards clearly outlining the income and asset levels that would qualify individuals for tax-paid criminal defense. Now, it is left to local officials and the standards unfairly vary across the state.

Next, if more money can't be found, the associations of judges -- particularly district judges -- can adopt standards of conduct for their own members that emphasize the importance of making sure all criminal defendants are fully aware of their rights to an attorney at all stages of any criminal proceeding. No defendant should be tricked out of a valid defense, and such actions by judges ought to be a subject of review by the Judicial Tenure Commission.

If the provision of defense attorneys stays at the county level, counties could benefit from looking at the Macomb Circuit Court's process for assigning defense lawyers. In criminal cases, there are three lists of attorneys assigned to cases on a rotating basis. The lists are compiled by a committee of judges and the county bar and are based on the experience level of the attorneys.

The most serious cases have the most experienced attorneys assigned to them. Others have attorneys with a moderate amount of experience, and the least experienced attorneys are assigned minor cases. In this way, attorneys are matched with the seriousness of the offense, and the rotating system of assignments removes opportunities for favoritism or patronage by the judges.

Providing an adequate defense for the poor is a basic function of government and should not be an afterthought in state and county budgets.

Michigan Report

June 18, 2008

STATE UNEMPLOYMENT LEVELS RISE SHARPLY IN MAY

State officials called Michigan's May unemployment rate of 8.5 percent a "shocking" increase, and said efforts must continue to both push job development and control government spending.

And one business group said the increase in unemployment demands that legislators repeal the surcharge put on the Michigan Business Tax as a way of helping companies boost business.

The stunning 1.6 percentage point increase in the jobless rate from the May level of 6.9 percent pushes unemployment to its highest level in the state since October 1992.

The increase occurred the same month that the total seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in the U.S. jumped by .5 percentage point to 5.5 percent, the highest level the U.S. has seen in years. The Michigan rate was by far the worst of any state, with the next highest the 6.7 percent in Alaska followed by 6.2 percent in California.

Among neighboring states, the best jobless rate was 4.3 percent in Wisconsin and the next highest after Michigan was Ohio's 5.6 percent.

[Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) and House [Speaker Andy Dillon](#) (D-Redford Twp.) issued a joint statement saying the increase means efforts to boost the economy will continue to be "a top priority throughout the year."

"Michigan's already battered economy is feeling the effects of a struggling national economy being driven by a crisis in the subprime market and high oil prices," Ms. Granholm and Mr. Dillon said in their statement. This crisis has created the urgency to boost the economy and create jobs.

Senate [Majority Leader Mike Bishop](#) (R-Rochester) called the unemployment numbers "shocking and disappointing."

Unlike Ms. Granholm and Mr. Dillon, Mr. Bishop however said the focus for state government now had to be on cutting costs to reduce government.

If there was to be a silver lining in the unemployment numbers, Mr. Bishop said, it was that government had to change how it fundamentally operates.

And Todd Anderson of the Small Business Association of Michigan said the increase means the Legislature should immediately repeal the surcharge

assessed on the Michigan Business Tax. "We believe that the surcharge is contributing to the rise in unemployment," he said. "The surcharge is job killer, plain and simple." He argued that the surcharge is forcing companies to either lay off workers or not hire people as they have to pay more taxes. The number of unemployed workers in the state jumped by 82,000 during the month, fueled in part by large numbers of workers attempting to find summer work, according to the Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

In May, 26,000 more people entered the work force, boosting the state's labor force to 5.008 million. But 428,000 persons were considered out of work. And the total number of people employed fell by 56,000 to 4.58 million.

Most of the increase in the labor force occurred just in the Detroit-Warren-Livonia market, the state's largest, where 25,000 people boosted the labor force to 2.139 million. But the number of people working in the area fell by 15,000 to 1.94 million.

As a result the Detroit-area jobless rate leaped 1.9 percentage points to 9.3 percent in May.

Ironically, during May, there was a slight increase of 3,000 jobs in the state's manufacturing sector, which had been the sector that had lost the most jobs. There were also increases in the professional and health services, education and health services, and the leisure and hospitality services industries.

Jobless rate hits 16-year state high

Surge in summer job-seekers floods labor market

BY JOHN GALLAGHER • FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER • JUNE 19, 2008

Hordes of summer job-seekers flooding into the labor market pushed Michigan's unemployment rate up to 8.5% during May, a level not seen since October 1992.

The May rate, up from April's rate of 6.9%, seemed likely to keep Michigan at its worst-in-the-nation ranking for jobless rates, with an estimated 428,000 unemployed in a workforce of about 5 million people.

"This time of year, numerous individuals, especially youth, typically enter the workforce seeking seasonal employment. Due to the overall sluggish economy, many were not successful as of May," said Rick Waclawek, director of the Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives in the state's Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

Noting the possibility of a onetime fluke, he added, "This is an unusually large monthly shift in the jobless rate, so additional months of data will be needed to see if this higher jobless rate is sustained."

Ironically, many of the state's industries, including manufacturing, actually added jobs during the month. But the huge surge in new entrants pushed the jobless rate up.

Michigan Report

June 18, 2008

GOVERNOR SEEKS MORE FLEXIBLE OPTIONS FOR STATE WORKER SCHEDULES

Plans by department directors are expected as early as July on providing more options for flexible work schedules, telecommuting or other alternatives by state employees as one way to help them deal with rising gasoline costs. [Governor Jennifer Granholm](#), who alerted employees of the plans in a letter on Wednesday, has held two meetings with her cabinet to formulate plans.

Already, over a third of the state's workforce is on a shifted work day or work up to 12 hours a day to reduce the number of days at work. About 2,500 work four 10-hour days.

"The governor is working with the cabinet to expand the options and see what we can do to be more proactive to encourage employees to consider alternative work schedules," said spokesperson Liz Boyd.

The governor, in her letter, said, "I know we can find additional opportunities to do our work in different settings and through alternative work schedules while still providing Michigan citizens with the excellence and service they expect and deserve from their state government."

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Governor urges four-day work weeks

Granholt letter says all state departments should offer the alternative scheduling option to save on gas as prices increase.

Mark Hornbeck / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Four-dollar-a-gallon gas could lead to more four-day-a-week state employees.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm sent out a letter this week urging state departments to expand the number of workers already on the four-day option, as well as those working from home via computer, to help employees avoid piling up commuting mileage at least one day a week.

"As gas prices continue to soar and with everyone looking for more affordable ways to get by in a struggling economy, I have charged my cabinet with finding creative alternatives for getting our work done," Granholm said in a letter to state employees.

Advertisement

"I know we can find additional opportunities to do our work in different settings and through alternative work schedules."

More than one-third of state workers already take part in alternative scheduling, including the four-day-a-week, 10-hour-a-day plan.

About 8 percent are working longer days -- up to 12 hours, state officials said. Some employees, such as prison guards and state hospital attendants, would not be eligible for a shortened work week.

Roberto Mosqueda, president of the Michigan State Employees Association, said he expects more members of his union to put in for four-day weeks. Child support workers and conservation officers in the 5,000-member union already are on the 4-10 plan, he said.

"We're all for it. We're looking for any way we can to get our members to work and save money on gas," Mosqueda said.

Granholtz's move to shorten work weeks for more state workers follows unanimous approval last week by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners of county Executive L. Brooks Patterson's proposal to allow some employees to volunteer for a four-day week.

The governor also is calling for other local governments and private sector employers to move to a four-day week.

In an effort to reduce mileage and gas expenses for the state vehicle fleet, the Department of Management and Budget is pushing more teleconferencing and video-conferencing, said Liz Boyd, spokeswoman for Granholtz.

You can reach Mark Hornbeck at (313) 222-2470 or mhornbeck@detnews.com.



June 19, 2008

PHIL POWER: State should embrace shortened work-week

Gas is, as I write this, \$4.19 at my neighborhood station, and they've dropped the \$50 credit card limit on the pump.

This is getting plenty serious.

Fortunately, there is somebody taking a common-sense approach to the problem: Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson. A month ago, he proposed voluntary rescheduling for county employees so they'd work four days a week, 10 hours a day.

That would allow them to save a day's worth of gas. Last week, the Oakland County Commission unanimously approved the idea: "By allowing employees to work four 10-hour days it will save them 20 percent on their commute costs and ease the financial pinch of filling up their cars," a press release from Patterson's office proclaimed.

When I talked with him last week, Brooks was enthusiastic. "Look, we've got about 4,000 county employees. If 1,500 employees take the four-day week, a conservative estimate is they'd save two gallons of gas not commuting the fifth day. At \$4 gallon, that's eight bucks a week for one employee, or \$12,000 a week for all 1,500.

"Over a year, that adds up in a hurry."

Patterson says the idea first emerged while "some of us were kicking around the big rise in gas prices" several months ago.

"We thought about what we could do to ease the financial pressure on our employees, and this seemed a pretty sensible way to go about it." What about scheduling so county offices remain staffed?

True, "we have to work out the schedules, but that's doable," says Patterson. (Jobs that require round-the-clock staffing, such as sheriff's deputies, won't be eligible for the four-day week.)

What about the public employee unions? Do you have to re-negotiate your labor contracts? I wanted to know. Evidently not.

"This program is voluntary and it's pretty popular. If the unions wanted to challenge it, they'd be hard-pressed. We'll probably have to sit down and talk, but I don't see a big problem."

Patterson says he's been contacted by "hundreds" of businesses in Oakland County interested in trying the same idea. "This is something that all local government units should be trying. It should spread all across the state."

With that in mind, I called Liz Boyd, Gov. Jennifer Granholm's press secretary, to see if state government was interested in following suit. Her response: "The governor met with her cabinet within the past three weeks on this idea. We want to help state employees with gas prices. More than one third of state employees already work on flexible schedules, including a four-day week.

"Right now we're compiling information."

Hmmm. Doesn't sound like adopting a gas-saving plan is uppermost in the minds of the Granholm Administration.

I tried — and failed — to get the governor's spokesman to be more specific. Yet the potential for savings is very large indeed. When you figure there are around 53,000 state employees, the math adds up pretty quickly. Adopting Patterson's assumptions, if 37 percent of all state employees adopt the program, that's 19,875.

Multiple that by two gallons (\$8) a week, and you get nearly \$160,000 in annual gas savings for state employees.

That's at \$4 a gallon, mind you, and prices are already past that barrier and marching north. Still — that sum is a tidy number, and one that certainly should excite the attention of an employer who's interested in helping out beleaguered state employees.

What about state public employee unions? Would a four-day work week require re-negotiating labor contracts with the unions?

Alas, the governor's press secretary didn't want to talk about that.

So I don't know whether the Granholm administration is seriously working on Patterson's common sense idea. I don't know whether a public employee union — or anybody else — is standing in the way. I don't know whether other political pressures are at work.

But I do know that a voluntary four-day work week saves financially strapped workers money they would have to spend on gas. And that seems to meet the "let's do something simple and practical" test that all public bodies should have on top of their minds.

Some do. And, evidently, some sadly don't.

Former newspaper publisher and University of Michigan Regent Phil Power is a longtime observer of Michigan politics and economics, and a former chairman of the Michigan chapter of the Nature Conservancy. He is also the founder and president of The Center for Michigan, a centrist think-and-do tank which publishes the Michigan Scorecard. The opinions expressed here are Power's own and do not represent the official views of The Center. He welcomes your comments at ppower@thecenterformichigan.net.
